



Lawyers' Christian Fellowship Newsletter

www.lawyerschristianfellowship.org

OCTOBER 2007

COMING UP

Christmas FUNCTION 2007

**1 December
2007**

at the home of
David & Jenny Ford
3 Strathfield Avenue
Strathfield

Our speaker

Steve Frost

a regular speaker to church &
community groups, Steve is
the principal lawyer of
Waybridge Community Legal
Centre, Ryde

will speak on

Law & Grace in the Suburbs

response form enclosed.



LESSONS FROM A 3,500 YEAR OLD PRIME MINISTER OF EGYPT

For those of you who have wondered what has happened to the LCF newsletters this year I must admit Joseph is largely responsible. How is that for shifting the blame. I am normally very good at saying no to requests that tax the little free time I have but this time I succumbed when I was asked to prepare a series of bible studies for my church's homegroups on Genesis 37-50. I had previously (about 10 years ago) prepared a series on Jonah which had been used by groups. I was given a choice of this passage or the beginning of Revelation. I took Genesis because I soon found that there were few bible studies on this passage. In fact I could find few sermon series on the internet on it.

I cannot count the number of sermons I have heard on Daniel. When our churches come to speak about the place of work in the life of a believer and how to cope in the commercial world as a believer it is invariably to Daniel they turn; that Hebrew who in exile in Babylon rose to prominence as a servant of successive Babylonian kings. There are lots of things to admire about Daniel – he drew the line with the world by refusing to eat at the kings table, he continued to pray even where it led to his peril. Then there is Daniel in the lion's den. It doesn't surprise me that Daniel is cited as an example of how to serve God in hostile environment. Many Christians see the commercial world as such an environment and parallels are easily made. If it is not Daniel – then it will be Nehemiah. This time a prominent official at the Persian court. Again a stranger in a strange land. A shining example of Godly leadership as he leads a remnant back to rebuild Jerusalem and withstands the manipulation of the local Persian bureaucracy.

But what about Joseph? He was an administrator – he worked for the most powerful man in the world at the time – Pharaoh. Why does he so rarely get a mention?

So here in summary are some of the lessons from Joseph. Of course to understand what follows you will need to read Genesis 37-50.

Familiarity breeds contempt or at least complacency

Joseph is one of those stories that gets done to death in Sunday school. Perhaps we are so familiar with it that we think that we do not really need to study it

GRADUATE WITH A MISSION

Amy is a recent law graduate who has left employment with a large firm and has taken up an internship with International Justice Mission (IJM) in South Asia for 9 months. Founded by Gary Haugen (author "The Good News About Injustice") IJM seeks to free those who are enslaved by prostitution and bonded labour. It works alongside other NGOs who are aware of the abuses by are not resourced to deal with them.

Amy would value any prayer or financial support that members could provide. If you want to assist please email the editor at sjn@pnc.com.au. Please pray for her as she adjusts to life in South Asia.

in detail. We are so familiar with it that we struggle to see beyond the story and appreciate its significance. I think Jonah, until recently, also got the same treatment. As I became a Christian at university I never went to Sunday school and I only went to one Scripture lesson (on Daniel ironically). So Joseph was not familiar to me from Sunday school. The only difficulty with this thesis is that the story of Daniel is probably even more familiar from Sunday school and yet we still get sermon series on it (of course they tend to stop before the weird stuff in Daniel).

I think the answer lies in how we preach Genesis. I have heard many sermon series on Genesis 1-11, a few on Genesis 12-36 but (until recently) none on Genesis 37-50. We tend to run out of steam and never get to the end of Genesis. Genesis 1-11 is foundational and profoundly theological while the end of Genesis is often seen as a good story. Perhaps the musical Joseph and his technicolour raincoat has done little to change that perception.

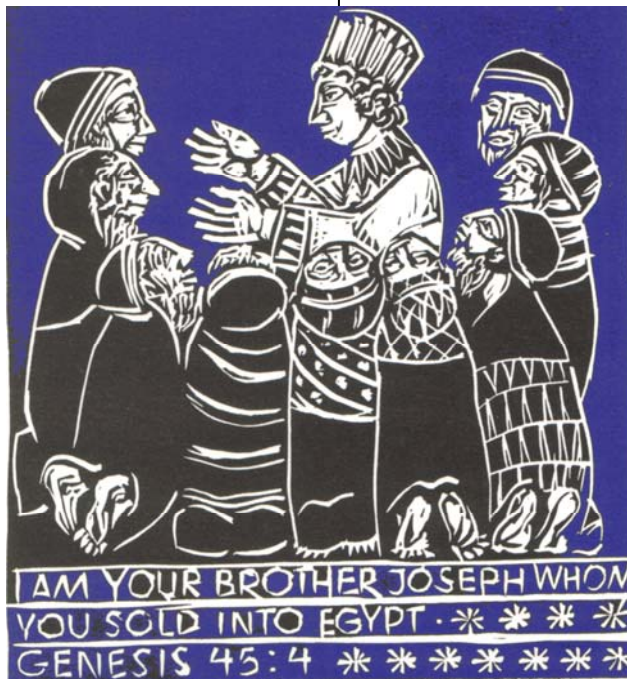
Forgiveness and Reconciliation are different.

Joseph's brothers (excluding Benjamin) sold Joseph into slavery never expecting to see him alive. So it comes as a surprise to them when they eventually find out that he is the most powerful person in Egypt (the G1 of its day) aside from the living god Pharaoh. Not a pleasant surprise – their response is dismay/fear (Gen 45:3). Justice would demand that the brothers be punished. Joseph had the power of life and death over his brothers. Yet his response is one of grace. He does not want them to be distressed or angry because "God sent me before you to preserve life". Joseph sees his three years in slavery and ten years in gaol not ultimately as the result of his brothers' jealousy and spite but as God working to save the people of Israel. Joseph sees the big picture. He weeps over them and asks them to bring his father and not to quarrel on the way home (something only a brother would say). Joseph has forgiven them for their wrongs. But what about the brother's response. We know from the earlier chapter (Gen 42:2) that they regretted what they had done to Joseph because they see that the famine and their troubles in Egypt are a consequence – but they never actually repent.

This is a controversial interpretation in that a lot of the commentaries say that Joseph and his brothers were reconciled. I disagree because of what happens over

17 years later after the death of their father Jacob. The brothers feared that Joseph would pay them back for the evil they did (Gen 50:15) now that Jacob's protection is gone. The brothers still live in fear – you do not fear retribution if you are reconciled with the person you offended. The brothers had never repented and confessed their evil deed to their brother. In the end they do it in a rather deceptive way by telling Joseph that Jacob had commanded that Joseph forgive the "transgression of your brothers and their sin". They trade on Joseph's love for his father to get themselves off the hook. I suspect Jacob never knew what the brothers did to Joseph because Joseph never told him. I think he would have mentioned it in Gen 49 where he dredges up some home truths about his sons. A further example of Joseph's blessing.

Joseph's response is pure grace – he wept and reassured them that what they meant for evil God meant for good. He promised to provide for them and their family and "he comforted them and spoke kindly to them".



Joseph was entitled to demand justice but he gave grace.

Forgiveness can be one way – Joseph can forgive his brothers (and he had 17 years earlier) but it takes at least two to reconcile. The brothers had to confess their sin in order to be reconciled to their brother. The sad part is that they waited 17 years and lived in fear for 17 years.

God uses the outsider

This section of Genesis is not really about Joseph but about Jacob and his descendants. The other stand out character in this passage is Judah. The oddest part of this section of Genesis is chapter 38. It is out of chronological order as it probably occurs while Joseph is prime minister of Egypt but it is located before the story of his slavery and imprisonment.

It is significant that Judah has moved away from his family (a form of treason in a society that requires every fit male to defend the family). He married a Canaanite woman (just as Isaac had warned Esau not to do) and had three sons. The first son married a Canaanite Tamar. When he died she married his brother who also met with an early death. Judah promised his third son to her when she was older but did not come through on the promise. Tamar after the death of Judah's wife poses as a temple prostitute, Judah sleeps with her not knowing her identity and Tamar falls pregnant. It is an act of idolatry as much as infidelity. In a scene reminiscent of Monica Lewinsky she is wise enough to keep the seal and staff of the man

she slept with. When Judah hears of her pregnancy he accuses her of infidelity and demands her death. His hypocrisy is exposed when she reveals Judah to be the father. Judah laments "She is more righteous than I since I did not give her to my son Shelah". She goes on to have twins and she is recorded as an ancestor of Jesus in Matthew's gospel.

This marks a change in Judah. Next time we see him he is not using his eloquence to sell his brother into slavery but is offering himself to be a slave in Benjamin's place. His life is transformed by this incident with a Canaanite woman posing as temple prostitute where he worships a pagan idol by sleeping with her. God uses the outsider (Canaanite), the weak (female) and outcast (prostitute) to show up God's people and achieve his plan.

Remember the big picture.

Joseph is sold into slavery, in slavery he resists the temptations of his owner's wife and ends up imprisoned for ten years. Seven years in there is a ray of hope when a prisoner he helps is released and yet he remains another three years in prison because the prisoner forgets him. He is finally dragged out of gaol to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh which he does with God's assistance and is appointed Prime Minister of Egypt at age 30. Despite the injustice of his imprisonment, the injustice of his incarceration we never hear Joseph blaming God. In fact through all this adversity God seems central to his life.

When he is in the position of power he does not seek revenge on Potiphar, his wife or his brothers. He recognises the hand of God in all that has happened to him (Gen 45:5 and 50:20) and how it was part of a bigger plan that God had for humanity – for the people of God to be a blessing to the nations. The measures Joseph takes in preparing for the famine ensure that surrounding peoples come to Egypt for food. They are saved by because God put him in the position of Prime Minister of Egypt.

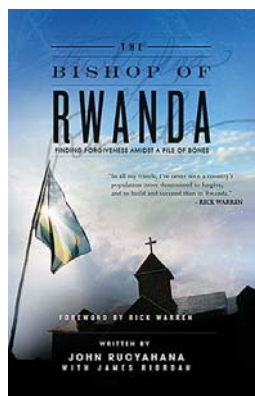
Sometimes we need to take our eyes off the adversity and the problems that seem to afflict us and look at the bigger picture – God's plan for humanity and our role in that. We need to get our perspective right and see the world through God's eyes. This means remembering who God is – Lord of the universe and who we are (fallen and redeemed) and why we are here (to bring glory to God).

Full Time Paid Christian Ministry

Most of the ministers where I worship are always seeking to encourage people to go into full-time Christian ministry. It led me to reflect on this topic a little— why is not being a Christian lawyer not seen as a full-time Christian ministry— why is it that we seem to perceive working full time for a Christian organization to be ministry and why is everything considered something less. Have concepts of calling and vocation, apart from full-time Christian service fallen from

favour? Why do I not hear the same encouragement for those who work in "secular employment". For me the important thing is that I am where God wants me to be, when God wants me to be there, doing what God wants me to do in a way that brings Him the glory. I do not need to be working for a Christian organisation to be doing that. How else do you explain Jesus' first thirty years? Joseph is a great example of a person called by God— he was where God wanted him to be, doing what God wanted him to do and glorifying God while he did it.

William Wilberforce is another example. As a young Parliamentarian he came to John Newton (ex-slaver, a clergyman and author of the hymn Amazing Grace), whom he had known as a boy to seek his Counsel about whether he should take up a "religious vocation". Newton encouraged him to remain in Parliament (and subsequently mentored him) writing shortly after the meeting "I hope the Lord will make him a blessing, both as Christian and as a statesman. How seldom do these characters coincide! But they are not incompatible". Twenty-one years later, when Newton was nearing death he would see that blessing manifest itself in an Act of Parliament introduced by Wilberforce to abolish slavery.



THE BISHOP OF RWANDA— finding forgiveness amidst a pile of bone.

By John Rucyahana with James Riordan, Thomas Nelson, 2007

I first met John Rucyahana at an international convocation of Prison Fellowship. He is a shortish, elderly Anglican African Bishop who wears the clergy kit.

Like many Africans I met at the conference he is optimistic and cheerful. He spoke at one of the afternoon seminar sessions (the siesta hour after lunch). He had a gruesome and great story to tell of what God has been doing in Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide that occurred ten years ago. He also struck me as a person of great compassion. On hearing of the plight of the French Canadian General who had commanded the UN forces in Rwanda at the time of the genocide (he had a breakdown and was struggling with what had happened), he immediately wanted to organise a meeting with the former General before he left the country..

His talk was one of those which I wished I could have shared with more people. I obviously was not the only person who thought this as Thomas Nelson have now published Bishop John's story.

This book is not for everyone – at least a large part of it is not. It is often said you have to understand the depths of sin before you can really appreciate the heights of grace. This is such a book. For the

squeamish I would suggest you read chapter one and then chapter 8 till the end. Chapters 2-8 give Bishop John's understanding of the causes of the genocide but also depict in gruesome detail the barbarity of the genocide – or as Bishop John would say its demonic nature. These chapters are not an easy read. In particular it is hard to believe what one or many humans are capable of doing to another. The descriptions (see the toned down description at the end of this review) could only be described as sickening and put in the shade even the most creative barbarity of Hollywood. The Hotel Rwanda looks like a romance compared to what Bishop John recounts. The end result was the massacre of approximately 1,117,000.00 people in a three month period in a deliberate and premeditated massacre perpetrated along "racial" lines. The reason for the inverted commas is that Bishop John argues the two racial groups Hutu and Tutsi had intermarried for generations and there really was not a "pure Hutu" or "pure Tutsi" in the country. Yet ID cards designated people one or the other and propaganda and fallen human nature did the rest. Bishop John sees the genesis of the tension in the colonial governments that favoured one group against the other to maintain their dominance.

The book does not let the West or the UN off lightly either. Bishop John argues it was the French who provided the machetes that were used to hack to death hundreds of thousands. He sees the UN as sitting on its hands despite the increasingly desperate reports it was receiving from its French Canadian General. You can only imagine his horror at believing that quick decisive action by his forces could nip the genocide in the bud only to be told by his superiors (Kofi Annan in particular) not to get involved but to sit on his hands. He then had to witness the massacre first hand. Bishop John says the West denied the reality of the genocide until it was almost over despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. In fairness to Bishop John he also recounts how Madeline Albright, Bill Clinton and Kofi Annan all came to Rwanda some years later and apologised to the people for their failure to act. At the end of chapter 11 he notes the steps to genocide and how it is on the rise and then laments our present failure to stop it this time in Dafur in the Sudan.

Is it all doom and gloom? No the part of the story (chapters 8-12) that makes the book ultimately encouraging is what God is doing in the aftermath of the genocide. The steps taken to bring healing to the country. The great work that is going on with the churches in the prisons where prisoners are repenting and being reconciled with their victims and their families and making restitution to them. The Government has embraced this model of repentance, forgiveness, and restitution (restorative justice). The following testimonies perhaps embrace better than any reviewer could the heart of the book. The context is a program where prisoners who have repented and asked forgiveness build houses for the victims:

Ex prisoner Nemeve

"The cooperation we experienced during the construction of the houses really helped to close the gap between us and the survivors of the genocide. We used the time we spent together to talk about many things that helped reconcile us. When an old lady would pick up a brick, there would be an ex-convict to help her. The housing project was a blessing because, during the genocide, we not only killed people, but we looted and demolished houses that belonged to Tutsis as well. It was a real blessing to the homeless survivors."

Nemeve was the neighbour of Sefa Murego. It is her story that starts the book. Nemeve had participated in the barbaric dismembering by machete of Sefa's husband and her pack rape and the brutal death of her baby. Sefa was then knocked out and her house set alight. She was rescued by relatives but her son and husband died.

Sefa states - "Then, one day I was at least able to pray that I would be able to forgive someday. I still couldn't imagine meeting them face-to-face, but when I saw them God gave me the heart to forgive. At first I just talked with Nemeve and Ndanguza, but when I saw the pain they felt and learned about the changes they'd gone through, I became more open with them."

"When we worked together on the building of my home and I realised that, in a way, they had been victims too. Then I was able to forgive them. I care about the house, yet, but I care more about the changed hearts of the men who are building it for me. I don't know how this happened. It is a miracle. I guess but we even can laugh together now. And the pain is much less."

We worship a great God – a God of miracles – a God of healing and forgiveness. As Bishop John points out Jesus did not wait until he stopped hurting on the Cross before he forgave those who put him there. It is by His stripes we are healed.

This is a hard book to read, a painful book to read but ultimately it is an encouraging book as you see that God is doing a great thing in Rwanda.



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